

April is National Volunteer Month  
Tim Pehlke  
Orange County 4-H Program Coordinator

April is National Volunteer Month. At this time we recognize the amazing contributions of volunteers across the community, who freely give of their time and talents for the benefit of all. At this time we also call attention to the ways that you as an individual can make a difference in the lives of others.

A recent study by the Corporation for National Service highlights the need for added volunteer service in the Central Florida region. In a study of the nation's largest urban areas, the Orlando area ranked 47<sup>th</sup> of the nation's 51 largest urban areas. All told, 20% of area residents donated volunteer service of some form in 2008 (the most recent year data available). These figures are even worse for the state of Florida as a whole, whose 19% volunteer rate ranks it 48<sup>th</sup> among the 50 states.

I write this not to malign area residents. Rather, I wish to highlight the enormous opportunities for volunteerism that exist locally. Everyday nonprofit organizations are improving the life of our community by teaching job skills, providing positive alternatives for youth, enriching lives through the arts, and a whole host of other areas. Whether your passion is animals, children or anywhere in between, there is a volunteer opportunity with your name on it!

You may also be surprised to learn that many organizations offer flexible volunteer opportunities that can be performed from the comfort of your home. As a volunteer administrator for a large youth serving nonprofit, I can tell you that we are always looking for individuals with a professional skill set—graphic design, marketing, accounting, etc.

Why volunteer? The most obvious answer is this—the chance to make a tangible difference in people's lives! Over the years I have volunteered with numerous youth organizations. During this time I have had the privilege of watching youth blossom before my very eyes. Few accomplishments are more rewarding.

Want to gain valuable work experience? Interested in exploring a new career area? Volunteer service can be a great avenue for expanding your resume. There are even times when a volunteer role can lead to translate to a paid position.

You might be surprised to learn that volunteerism has health benefits. A 2008 study by the Corporation for National and Community Service found that volunteers (1) live longer on average, (2) function at a higher level than their non-volunteer peers, and (3) are less likely to be depressed.

Having volunteered with numerous community organizations over the years, I can attest to the benefits of volunteerism. In helping others I've gained much more than I could have ever given. Through volunteerism I hope that your lives will be enriched as well.